

## ||Sri Gurubhyo Namaha||

Pradosha Pooja Group, Bangalore, recently honoured Agnihothri Sri Ranganatha Sarma on his completing 60 years of age. Sri Ranganathan, prior to moving to Mysore on official work, was an active member of the group.

Sri Ranganathan born on 23 Dec 1950, at Coimbatore, has walked on this planet for over sixty years. Combining the characteristics of modernity and Dharmic-Vedic traditions, he has been a torch-bearer for many spiritually inclined fellow-men. He is what one may call “Nitya Agnihotri”, a rarity in these times practising Agnihotra Karmaanushtaanaas and maintaining the Aupasana Agni from day one of his marriage (1985) with sustained enthusiasm, albeit starting his Vedic education from the age of twenty (1970). His father (Late) Sri S Ganesha Sastri was a well known Vedic Scholar and had kramaantha adhyayanam from Palghat Chittur Paatashaala. His wife Smt.Bhuvana’s father, an octogenarian Sri H.S.Krishna Dixit, is still in the services of Lord Srikantheshwara at Nanjangud temple. It is small wonder therefore that Sri Ranganathan was destined to accede to his inner call and follow his chosen path of divinity with such deep fervor. Mention must also be made of his two engineer sons, who are well versed in Yajurveda Samhitha and assist him in performing Ishti.

Sri Ranganathan cites an incident which at a later date lit the dormant fire in him, apparently answering his life’s ‘Why & What for?’ To quote his own words,  
” I used to attend Upanyaasaas during younger days where I gathered informations regarding our Nityakarmaanushtaanaas viz. Snaanam, Sandhya, Japam, Homam, Vaiswadevam/atityam Devata pooja et al. I had this nagging doubt regarding daily Homa. How come that our offering of Naivedya, is ultimately consumed by us without being able to feed Gods directly? That’s when my father explained to me about Aupasana wherein Gods indeed get directly fed. I was also informed that Aupasana is to be taken up only after marriage.”

True to the saying “Udara nimittam bahukrita vesham”, Sree Ranganathan too had to don many a hat during his life’s professional Karma-trek. Basically a Chemical Engineer and a MBA (Finance) he worked initially in a private firm; thereafter successfully ran his own small scale industry; and finally joined KSIIDC, Bangalore from where he took VRS in Apr 2005 while he was still a DGM, all because he wanted to take up Agnihotra.

His Maargadarshin-s were Seers, men of divinity, spiritual seekers and scholars. He has been personally blessed and guided by the then pontiff of Sringeri – Jagadguru Abhinava Vidyateertha MahaswamgaL through Dr. Lakshminarayana Pandit. Sri Ranganathan has had occasions of visiting ishtis conducted by the latter, the then practising Agnihotri at Mysore, who impressed upon him the sanctity of Agnihotra and the divinity in performing various yajnas for the betterment of society.

A few words about Agnihotra may not be out of place:

The word Agnihotri is from agni (fire) and hotra (a ritual carried out in fire). Agnihotri means "one who carries out rituals in fire", i.e. the Agnihotra. The one who performs Agnihotra daily with faith and full trust in the Almighty can be called an Agnihotri. The one who means it when he says "*idem, na mama*" ((O Lord, all this is Yours, NOT mine) is a true *Agnihotri*. **Agnihotra** is a *Vedic Yajna* mentioned in the *Atharvaveda* (11:7:9) and described in detail in the *Yajurveda Samhita*. The central part of the Agnihotra consists of making two offerings of milk/Ghee/Rice into the fire exactly at, slightly before, or even after the time of sunset and sunrise, along with Vedic mantras that relate the fire and the sun to each other: This preserves the sun over night, which is also one of the interpretations of the ritual given in the Samhitas. This small rite is surrounded by a large number of additional actions and is followed by the worship of other sacred fires (agni-upasthāna). The ritual is performed by a Brahmin for his own or for the benefit of a sponsor (yajamāna) and the universe as a whole. There is a simplified version of the Agnihotra in the Grihyasutras and in later post-Vedic texts.

Having created Yagnaas along with mankind, the Creator expressed: "The Yagnaas are created with an intention of helping Devaas and manushyaas mutually for eternal happiness/prosperity. Let manushyaas perform yaagaas to feed devaas (through Aahutis) who in turn would provide all necessities of life (like Sun, rain, wind, heat, environment etc) to the manushyaas for their happy living on earth.

We marry in the presence of Agni which is maintained till death. All married people are to perform a homa in this Agni both at sunrise and sunset and this karma is called *Aupaasanam*. And the Agni is called *smaartha agni*. All samskaaras pertaining to the *yajamaana* and his family are to be performed in this *Aupaasanaagni*. This *Aupaasanaagni* is split into two portions – one portion is maintained as *Aupaasanaagni* and the second portion is developed – through a ritual called *AgniAadhaanam* – into a ***Srouta-Agni*** and maintained till the death of the *Yajamaana*. In this *Sroutaagni* only all the 400 yagnaas described in Vedas are performed. A *yajamaana* who maintains both *Smartha* as well as *Srouta Agni* and performs both *Aupaasana* and *Agnihotram* daily is called an *Aahitaagni* (meaning embodiment of Agni). *Sroutaagni* is generally maintained without quenching in a place called *Gaahapatya*. At the time of *Agnihotram* *Gaahapatyaagni* is further developed into two portions and kept in places called *Aahavaneeyam* and *Dhakhshinaagni* where *aahutis* are offered through Vedic chanting. *Agnihotram* is a *nitya karmaanushtaanam* like *Snaanam*, *Sandhyaavandanam*, *Gaayatri Japam*, *Vaiswadevam*, and *Nitya panchaayatana poojaa*.

*Agnihotra* homa properly done reaches *Surya*; from *Surya* through *antariksham* it rains. From rains *anna* (food) grows on earth; and *anna* (food) affords happiness to all. Thus *Agnihotri* secures and ensures the well being of the universe as a whole. *Agnihotra* is the result of *vedaadhyayanam*. All the *karmas* / *prayogas* in the *agnihotra* are based

on chanting of vedic mantras. Krishna yajurvedaa deals wholly with the concepts of performing various yagas for which agnihotram is the foundation. In Mahabharata sage Daumya declares “O king Dharmaputra- if you want to witness all the pure rivers as well as all the devas together, please visit any house where Agnihotra is performed. Siva Geeta confirms that all japas performed in agnihotra sannidhi shall result in poorna phala.” Siva Rahasya confirms the omnipresence of Siva in the 8 forms – 4 directions, Sun Moon, Nakshatraas and Agnihotri/Aahitaagni.

That’s why perhaps it is stated that “Agnihotra **samo dharma: na bhootho na bhavishyati**” *There is no karma ever equivalent to agnihotra.* And as for Agnihotri himself, the benefits he reaps would seem the ultimate; for having realized the essence of these nishkaamya karma and continuing the anushtaanaas attains brahmasaakshaatkaara or brahmaswaroopi:

Brahmaarpanam Brahma havi: brahmaagnau brahmanaa hutam. Brahmaiva tena gantavyam brahma karma samaadhinaa. (BhagavadgItA 4.24)

[The ladle is Brahman. The knower of Brahman perceives the instrument with which he offers oblation in the fire as Brahman Itself. The oblation is Brahman, the offering is poured by Brahman in the fire of Brahman. Brahman alone is to be reached by him who has concentration on Brahman as the objective, as the goal to be known and attained.]

**P.V.ANANTANARAYANAN**

